



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

**TODD P. GRAVES**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **GECKO COMMUNICATIONS OFFICERS PLEAD GUILTY TO TELEMARKETING FRAUD**

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that three office managers of telemarketing firm Gecko Communications, Inc., pleaded guilty in federal court today to aiding and abetting a \$12.5 million telemarketing wire fraud.

**Christopher L. Carlson**, 36, of Glenwood, Iowa, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Nanette K. Laughrey this afternoon to the charge contained in a Nov. 17, 2004, federal indictment. **Steven T. Rice**, 44, of Kansas City, Mo., **Jason R. Spencer**, 26, of Osceola, Iowa, pleaded guilty earlier this week.

By pleading guilty today, **Carlson** admitted that he engaged in a telemarketing scheme to defraud while managing the Gecko office in Stanton, Iowa, between January 2000 and Feb. 22, 2001. Graves explained that telemarketers in that office promised credit-challenged persons that, in exchange for payment of \$219.95, they would receive a major credit card and other ancillary benefits. In reality, Graves said, they only received an application for a credit card from the vendor of the product for whom **Carlson** was conducting a telemarketing campaign.

**Spencer**, who managed the Gecko office in Kansas City, and **Rice**, who managed the Gecko office in Lawrence, Kan., pleaded guilty to the same conduct. In all three cases, the defendants sent payroll by e-mail from their offices to Kansas City.

Under federal statutes, each of the three co-defendants could be subject to a sentence of up to 10 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000 and an order of restitution. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

In a separate but related case, **Christopher J. Ekeland**, 38, of Shawnee, Kan., pleaded

guilty on Sept. 16, 2004, pleaded guilty to telemarketing wire fraud and money laundering and agreed to forfeit \$10.6 million, derived from the proceeds of the telemarketing fraud, to the government, as well as two Guy Buffet paintings each valued at approximately \$3,000, 350 computers and related components seized from Gecko by law enforcement officers, and half the equity in his residence.

**Ekeland**, co-owner of Gecko Communications, is scheduled to be sentenced on May 25, 2006.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney William L. Meiners. It was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, IRS-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

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This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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